

THE CAPE COD TIMES

PILGRIM PLANT

Concern prompts state meeting on nuclear safety



The spent fuel storage casks at the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station in Plymouth stand behind a warning sign and chain barrier. Entergy, which owns the plant, recently brought in more than 1,000 workers to perform inspection and maintenance tasks that could only be done while the station was shut down. Steve Haines/Cape Cod Times

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Posted May. 14, 2015 at 7:16 PM

Updated May 14, 2015 at 7:17 PM

Opponents of Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station on both sides of the canal are set to meet next week with the state's undersecretary of Homeland Security and Emergency Management and two top officials from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to discuss the troubled nuclear reactor.

The meeting is in response to letters of concern sent by several area watchdog groups to Gov. Charlie Baker in early March, urging him to use his authority to protect the state's residents from dangers related to Pilgrim.

Copies of the letter, accompanied by more than 100 pages of documentation related to past problems at the plant, were also sent to Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Matthew Beaton, top officials at the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency and area legislators.

On Wednesday, Daniel Sieger, assistant secretary for Environment, C. Stolle Singleton, director of legislative affairs for the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and Kurt Schwartz, undersecretary for Homeland Security and Emergency Management, will meet at Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency headquarters in Framingham with representatives from the Cape Downwinders, Mass Peace Action/Boston Downwinders, and a Boston area group called On Behalf of Planet Earth.

"I see the meeting as a very positive sign," said Diane Turco, co-founder of the Cape Downwinders. "It shows the governor is taking this seriously."

"The administration looks forward to working with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency and stakeholders to maintain an ongoing dialogue and ensure the safety of our communities," said Lizzy Guyton, press secretary for Gov. Charlie Baker.

One of Turco's chief concerns is the lack of a viable evacuation plan for Cape residents should a nuclear accident occur. "I'm hoping MEMA will reject emergency plans that don't protect the public," Turco said. "They're asking the Cape to shelter in place. Knowing that would provide only two hours of protection is unconscionable."

Cape Cod has a generic all-hazards traffic plan that would cover situations such as floods, hurricanes and severe weather, but not a specific plan for a radiological event. Two years ago, KLD Engineering, a New York firm specializing in traffic patterns and evacuation planning, conducted a survey of Cape residents to determine how many would try to leave in a nuclear disaster. More than half of the respondents said they would race for the bridges.

"The traffic survey proves there will be hundreds of people trapped on the highway, hoping the wind doesn't blow in their direction," said fellow Downwinder William Maurer, of Falmouth. "I hope we can get that message across to Kurt Schwartz."

Under current plans, Cape traffic would be held back until after the 10-mile emergency zone around the power plant had been evacuated.

No further work on developing an emergency plan has occurred since that KLD survey was completed.

Last fall, the Barnstable County Emergency Planning Committee published a tip sheet

for “sheltering in place,” which is the current plan for Cape residents during a radiological incident. The advice from emergency experts is to immediately go inside, lock doors and windows, grab the portable radio and “stay calm.” The planning committee said their authority is limited to public education. State and federal emergency management officials prepare the plans and set the rules.

State Rep. Sarah Peake, D-Provincetown, hopes to attend Wednesday’s discussion. “My intention is to be there to see what they have to say and push for safety,” Peake said. “I think it’s exciting they’re doing this. The fact that Kurt Schwartz will be there is a very big deal.”

Entergy, which owns the 42-year-old plant, said in a statement that all of Pilgrim's emergency planning operations are reviewed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

"Pilgrim was designed and built with safety at its foundation and is committed to safe and reliable operations. Pilgrim works closely with MEMA, FEMA and all of its local, state and federal first-responder partners on its emergency planning operations," according to Entergy's statement. "We regularly review emergency plans and incorporate practical experience and lessons learned."
